

# NIH...Turning Discovery Into Health

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## Progress in Heart, Lung, and Blood Research

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### COPD

Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, or COPD, is a serious but largely preventable lung disease that makes it hard to breathe. COPD has had many different names throughout history, including “voluminous lungs” in the 17th century and “emphysema” more recently. Today, we know that COPD has two forms, emphysema and chronic obstructive bronchitis, and that most people with COPD have a combination of them. Emphysema and chronic obstructive bronchitis damage the lungs in different ways, but both make breathing difficult.

COPD is the 3<sup>rd</sup> most common cause of death in the U.S. More than 12 million Americans are currently diagnosed with COPD, and researchers estimate that 12 million more have it but do not know that they do. Doctors diagnose COPD using a simple test called spirometry that measures how well the lungs are working. Symptoms of COPD include chronic shortness of breath, a cough with mucus production, and wheezing. Smoking is the leading cause of COPD in the U.S., but genetic risk and environmental factors such as air pollution also play a role.

Research supported by the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHLBI) has shown that certain treatments and lifestyle changes — such as quitting smoking — can help people with COPD stay more active and slow the progression of their disease. Although there is no cure for COPD, early treatment can markedly improve people's quality of life.



In part because of advertisements and effective educational campaigns such as the NHLBI-led national campaign COPD Learn More Breathe Better®, more Americans than ever know about COPD. A recent survey found that 69 percent of adults are aware of COPD, up from 49 percent in 2004.

#### *Imagine the Future...*

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*Therapies repair damaged lung tissue, restoring a person's ability to breathe normally.*

*Effective quit-smoking programs prevent millions of COPD deaths in America and throughout the developing world.*

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